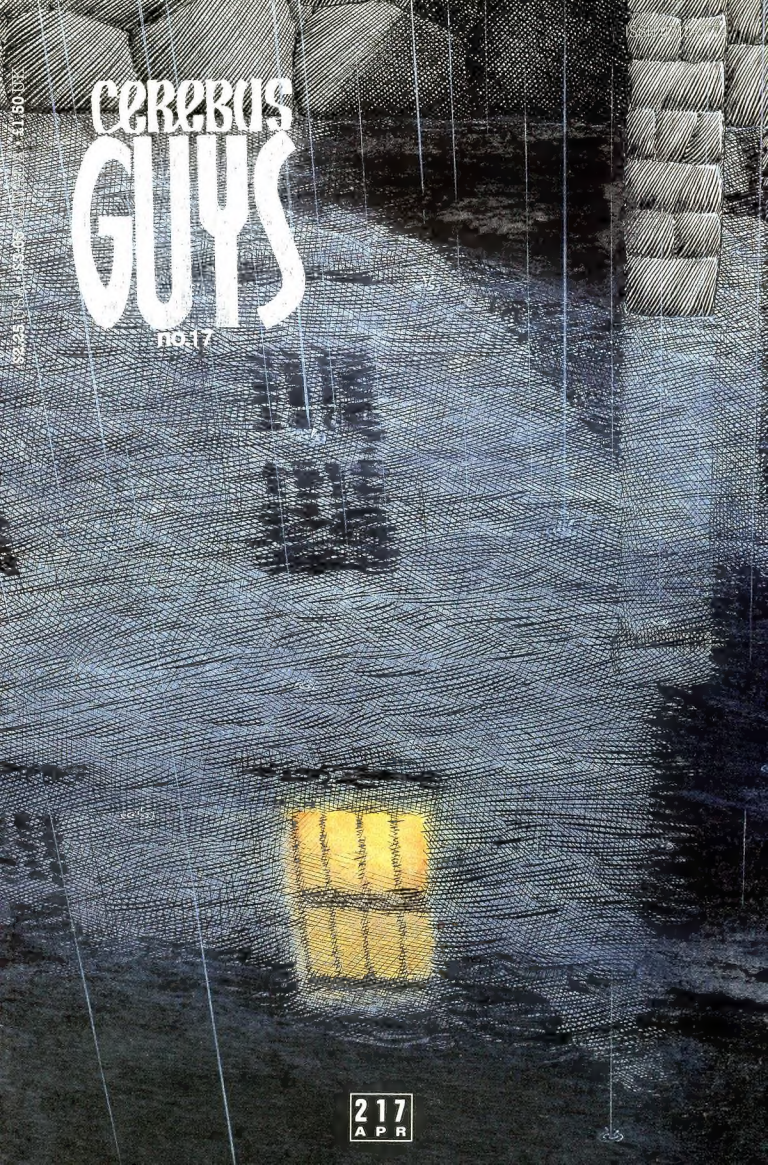
CEREBUS GUYS

no.17



217
APR

E X C E R P T

...LIFT-OFF. We have a lift-off, 32 minutes past the hour. Lift-off on Apollo 11.

But nobody watching the launch from the Press Site ever listened to the last few words. For at 8.9 seconds before lift-off, the motors of the Apollo-Saturn leaped into ignition, and two horns of orange fire burst like genies from the base of the rocket. Aquarius never had to worry again about whether the experience would be appropriate to his measure. Because of the distance, no one at the Press Site was to hear the sound of the motors until fifteen seconds after they had started. Although the rocket was restrained on its pad for nine seconds in order for the motors to multiply up to full thrust, the result was still that the rocket began to rise a full six seconds before its motors could be heard. Therefore the lift-off itself seemed to partake more of a miracle than a mechanical phenomenon, as if all of huge Saturn itself had begun silently to levitate, and then was pursued by flames.

No, it was more dramatic than that. For the flames were enormous. No one could be prepared for that. Flames flew in cataract against the cusp of the flame shield, and then sluiced along the paved ground down two opposite channels in the concrete, two underground rivers of flame which poured into the air on either side a hundred feet away, then flew a hundred feet further. Two mighty torches of flame like the wings of a yellow bird of fire flew over a field, covered a field with brilliant yellow bloomings of flame, and in the midst of it, white as a ghost, white as the white of Melville's Moby Dick, white as the shrine of the Madonna in half the churches of the world, this slim angelic mysterious ship of stages rose without sound out of its incarnation of flame and began to ascend slowly as we might swim upward in a dream looking for the air. And still no sound.

Then it came, like a crackling of wood twigs over the ridge, came with the sharp and furious bark of a million drops of oil crackling suddenly into combustion, a cacophony of barks louder and louder as Apollo-Saturn fifteen seconds ahead of its own sound cleared the lift tower to a cheer which could have been a cry of anguish from that near-audience watching; then came the earsplitting bark of a thousand machine guns firing at once, and Aquarius shook through his feet at the fury of this combat assault, and heard the thunderous murmur of Niagaras of flame roaring conceivably louder than the loudest thunders he had ever heard and the earth began to shake and would not stop, it quivered through his feet standing on the wood of the bleachers, an apocalyptic fury of sound equal to some conception of the sound of your death in the roar of a drowning hour, a nightmare of sound, and he heard himself saying, "Oh, my God! oh, my God! oh, my God! oh, my God! oh, my God! oh, my God!" but not his voice, almost like the Italian girl saying "*fenomenal*," and the sound of the rocket beat with the true blood of fear in his ears, hot in all the intimacy of a forming of heat, as if one's ears were in the cauldron of a vast burning of air, heavens of oxygen

...continued on last page

CEREBUS
NO. 217 APRIL 1997

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GUYS
a novel
•
(Cerebus 201 to Cerebus 219)

MONTHLY
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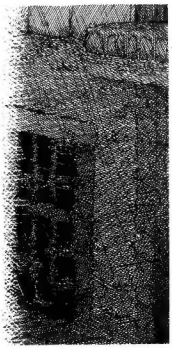
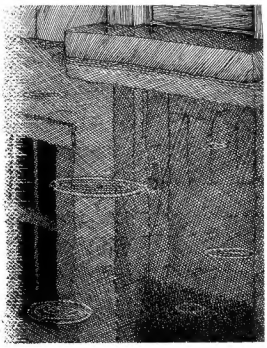
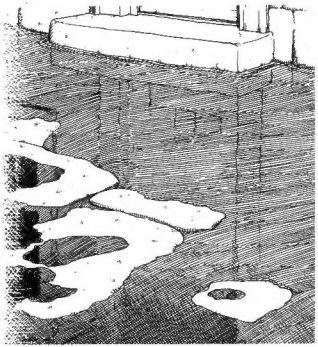




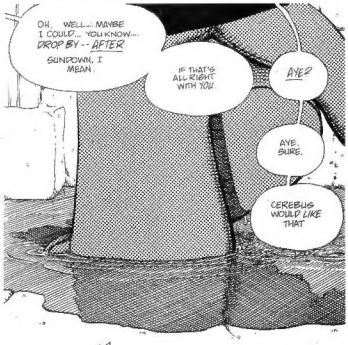


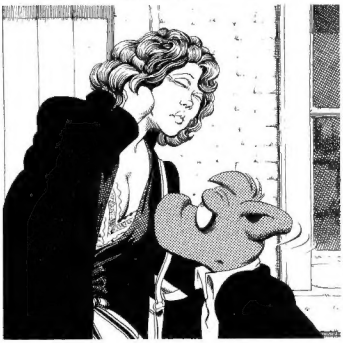
KLIK
KLAK
ARE YOU DON'T WANT TO COME OVER TO MY
CERBERUS WOULD LOVE TO...
REALLY.
BUT... uh... CERBERUS HAS TO OPEN HIS PUB...
ACTUALLY CERBERUS IS LATE ALREADY ...CERBERUS WAS SUPPOSED TO...

NO NO... I UNDERSTAND REALLY
I'VE GOT SOME THINGS I SHOULD DO TODAY ANYWAY.
AYE.

SKTCH SKTCH
GO uh
I HAD A REALLY GOOD TIME LAST NIGHT.
AYE. CERBERUS TOO... THANK YOU.
?
AND... uh THANK YOU

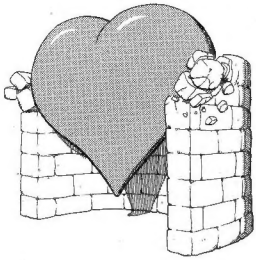
SO, YOU WORK EVERY DAY?
OH AYE
AYE.
SUN-UP TO SUNDOWN-- EVERY DAY
UH-HUH. AYE.
EVVERY DAY...


OH, WELL... MAYBE I COULD... YOU KNOW... DROP BY -- AFTER SUNDOWN, I MEAN.
IF THAT'S ALL RIGHT WITH YOU.
AYE?
AYE. SURE.
CEREBUS WOULD LIKE THAT

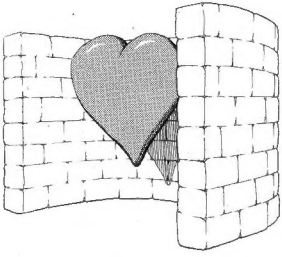


MMWAH
?
oh
MMWAH.
BYE FOR NOW

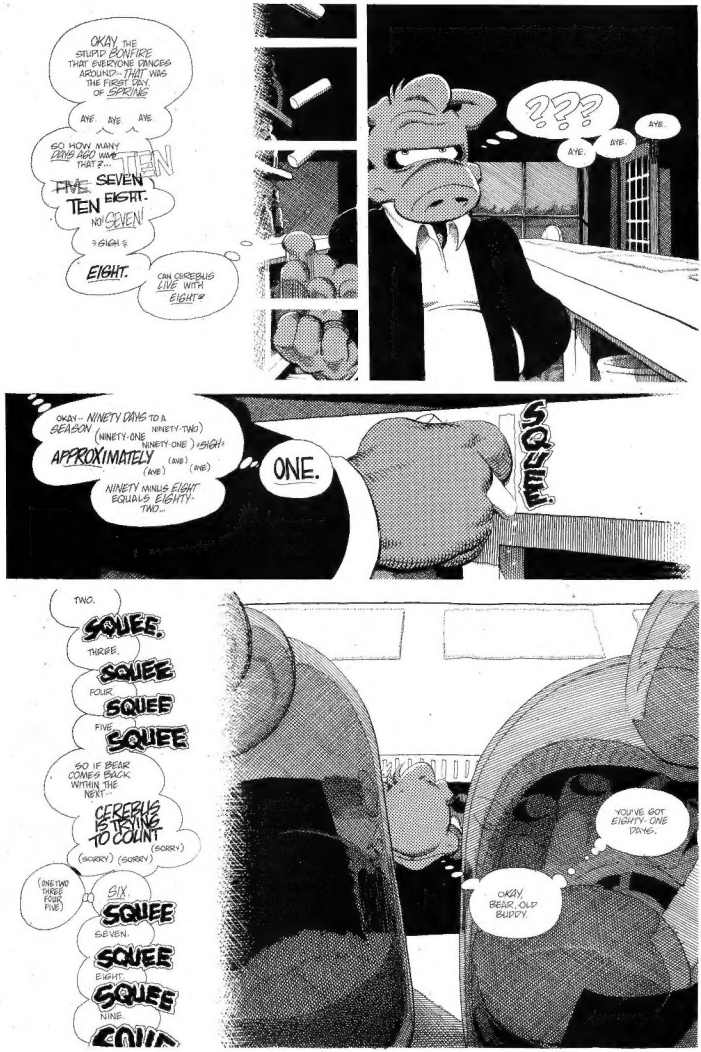
SEE YOU LATER!



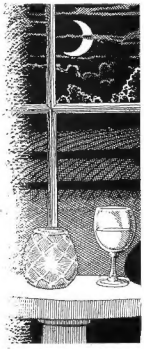
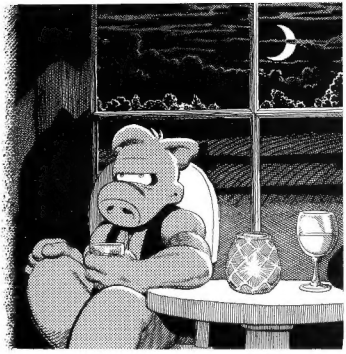
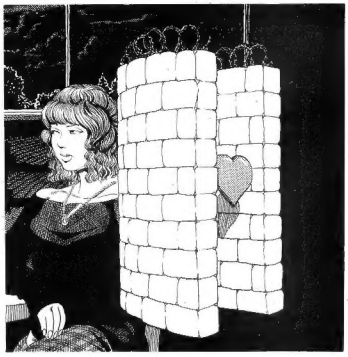
KLAK



PLEASE FORGIVE CEREBUS FOR WHAT HE IS GOING TO DO WITH JOANNE TONIGHT. AMEN.
ALSO!
SNIFF
PLEASE FORGIVE CEREBUS
SNIFF
FOR WHAT HE IS GOING TO DO WITH JOANNE
SNIFF
TONIGHT.
AMEN.

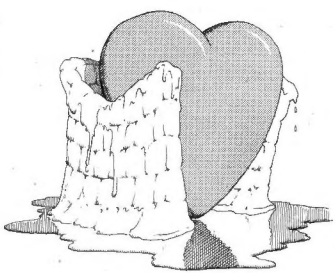

OKAY, THE STUPID BONFIRE THAT EVERYONE DANCES AROUND-- THAT WAS THE FIRST DAY OF SPRING
AYE. AYE. AYE.
SO, HOW MANY DAYS AGO WAS THAT?--
FIVE SEVEN TEN EIGHT.
NO! SEVEN!
SIGH.
EIGHT.
CAN CEREBUS LIVE WITH EIGHT?
???
AYE.
AYE.
AYE.
OKAY-- NINETY DAYS TO A SEASON (NINETY-ONE NINETY-TWO) APPROXIMATELY (AYE) (AYE) (AYE) SIGH.
NINETY MINUS EIGHT EQUALS EIGHTY-TWO...
ONE.
SQUEE.
TWO.
SQUEE.
THREE.
SQUEE
FOUR.
SQUEE
FIVE.
SQUEE
SO IF BEAR COMES BACK WITHIN THE NEXT--
CEREBUS IS TRYING TO COUNT
(SORRY) (SORRY) (SORRY)
(ONE TWO THREE FOUR FIVE)
SIX.
SQUEE
SEVEN.
SQUEE
EIGHT.
SQUEE
NINE.
SQUEE
YOU'VE GOT EIGHTY-ONE DAYS.
OKAY, BEAR, OLD BUDDY.

AHCHOO
KAFKAF
AH
AHCHOO

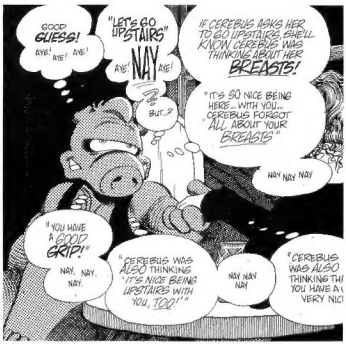




THIS IS GREAT
AYE AYE AYE
CEREBUS HAS SCOTCH.
AYE AYE AYE
CEREBUS HAS KAN POTATOES
AYE AYE AYE
AND
CEREBUS HAS JOANNE'S BREASTS ANY TIME HE
WHAT ARE YOU THINKING ABOUT?
LIE!
WHAT?
HUH?
IF CEREBUS TELLS HER THAT HE WAS THINKING ABOUT HER BREASTS
OH AYE AYE AYE
WHAT SHOULD CEREBUS SAY?
(THIS IS TAKING TOO LONG)
SMILE
PRETEND CEREBUS DIDN'T HEAR HER
PARDON?
YOU HAVEN'T SAID TEN WORDS SINCE I GOT HERE
SO I WAS JUST WONDERING
WHAT YOU WERE THINKING ABOUT.
NICE! SAY SOMETHING NICE!
"NICE BREASTS" NO!
"YOU LOOK NICE."
(BUT CEREBUS WASN'T LOOKING AT HER - HOW COULD THAT BE WHAT HE
AYE AYE AYE
WHAT THEN? HURRY!
HOW NICE IT IS TO BE
"HERE IS NICE"
NICE.
HERE.
CEREBUS WAS THINKING
HOW NICE IT IS TO BE HERE
"WITH YOU!"
WITH YOU.

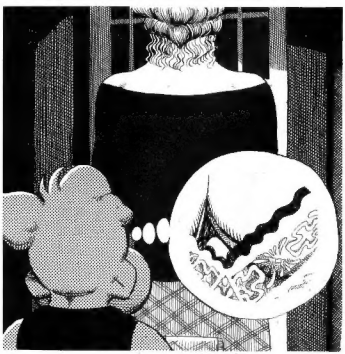
OOOHHHHH
THAT'S SO SWEEEET



SHE WANTS SOME OF CEREBUS' SCOTCH?
BUT...SHE'S DRINKING WINE.
HAND.
SHE'S WAVING HER HAND
SHE'S...
SHE'S LEAVING!
NAY. NAY. NAY.
HAND.
CEREBUS' HAND?
SHE WANTS

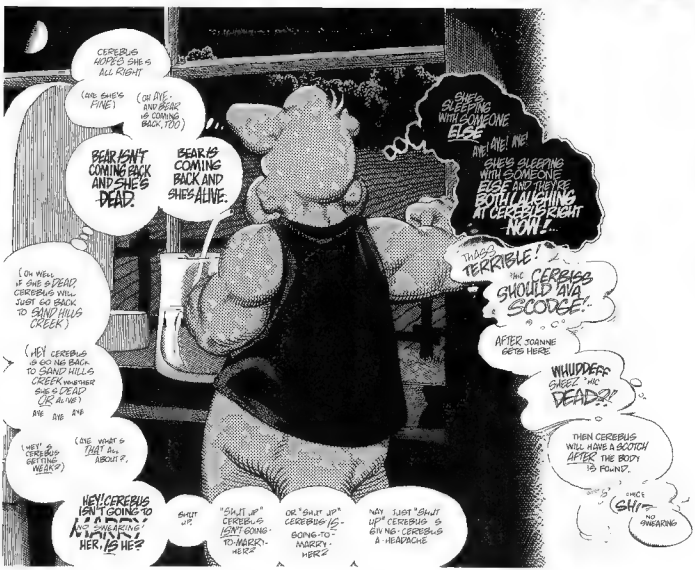

GOOD GUESS!
AYE! AYE! AYE!
"LET'S GO UPSTAIRS"
NAY
AYE!
AYE!
IF CEREBUS ASKS HER TO GO UPSTAIRS, SHE'LL KNOW CEREBUS WAS THINKING ABOUT HER BREASTS!
"IT'S SO NICE BEING HERE...WITH YOU... CEREBUS FORGOT ALL ABOUT YOUR BREASTS"
BUT...?
NAY NAY NAY
"YOU HAVE A GOOD GRIP!"
NAY. NAY. NAY.
"CEREBUS WAS ALSO THINKING "IT'S NICE BEING UPSTAIRS WITH YOU, TOO!""
NAY NAY NAY
"CEREBUS WAS ALSO THINKING TH YOU HAVE A VERY NIC

WHY DON'T WE FINISH OUR DRINKS
UPSTAIRS?

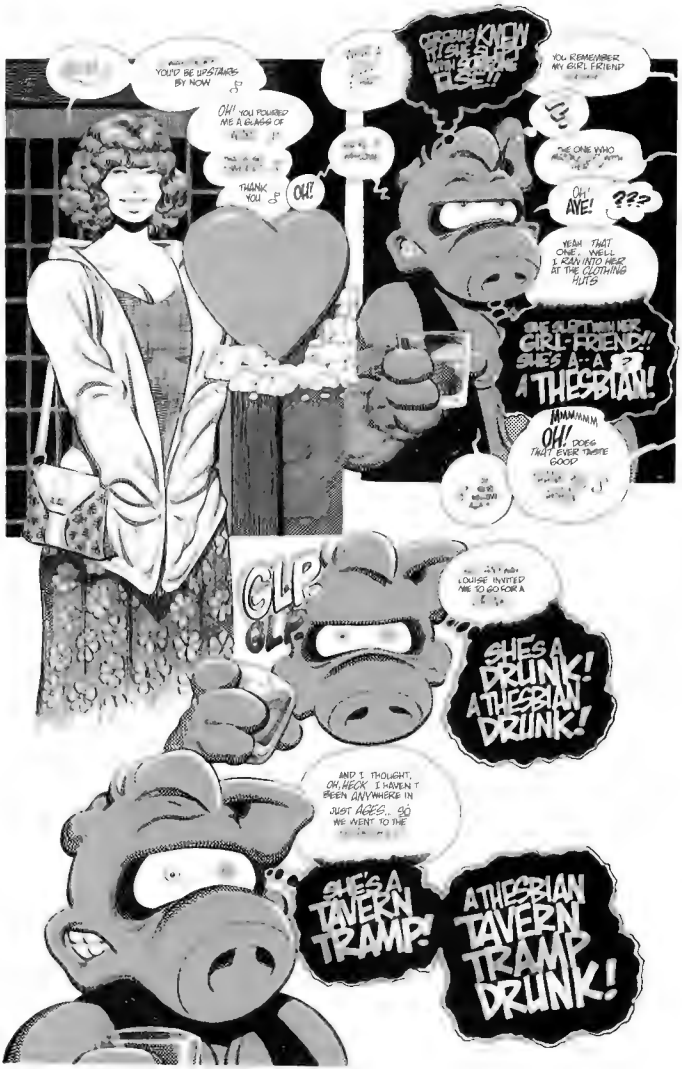


SIGH
CEREBUS .. IT'S LIKED TO BE SO SIMPLE .. WAKE UP.. GET DRESSED .. OPEN THE PUB.. STAND AROUND ALL DAY... CLOSE THE PUB.. DRINK .. GO TO SLEEP...
AYE! AYE! AYE!
NOW CEREBUS HAS TO BE TALKING ALL THE TIME...
AYE. AYE. AYE.
"YOU'RE SO QUIET WHAT ARE YOU THINKING ABOUT?"
THE SAME THING CEREBUS SPENDS THE WHOLE DAY THINKING ABOUT.
WHAT THE [illegible] IS CEREBUS GOING TO TALK ABOUT TONIGHT?
"SO WHAT DID YOU DO TODAY?"
CEREBUS STOOD AROUND ALL DAY .. CEREBUS STANDS AROUND EVERY DAY
"WHY ARE YOU SO ANGRY?"
BECAUSE EVERY NIGHT YOU ASK THE SAME STUPID QUESTION AND EVERY NIGHT
NOT MUCH WHAT D'D YOU DO TODAY?
OH, YOU WENT TO THE CLOTHING HUTS?!
GOSH! ISN'T THAT A SURPRISE?! THE CLOTHING HUTS YOU SAY
CONSIDERING YOU'VE SEEN THERE EVERY [illegible] DAY SINCE CEREBUS HAS KNOWN YOU... CEREBUS WOULDN'T HAVE GUESSED THAT ONE IN A MILLION!
AND IS THAT WHERE YOU FOUND THAT STUNNING OUTFIT?
OH YES CEREBUS I LIKES IT VERY MUCH
AND GOOD THAT MATCH! CEREBUS HAS TO SIT DOWN. IT'S ALL JUST TOO EXCITING FOR.
CEREBUS HAS TO GET OUT OF HERE

SUN'S ALMOST DOWN
CEREBUS STOOD AROUND ALL DAY
WHAT'S GOING TO ABOUT
NOT QUITE
AYE YA'T SHE'S USUALLY HERE BY NOW
SHE'S USUALLY HERE BEFOR THE SUN GOES DOWN


CEREBUS HOPES SHE IS ALL RIGHT
(OR, SHE'S FINE)
(OR AYE - AND BEAR IS COMING BACK, TOO)
BEAR ISN'T COMING BACK AND SHE'S DEAD.
BEAR IS COMING BACK AND SHE'S ALIVE.
SHE'S SLEEPING WITH SOMEONE ELSE
AYE! AYE! AYE!
SHE'S SLEEPING WITH SOMEONE ELSE AND THEY'RE BOTH LAUGHING AT CEREBUS RIGHT NOW!..
THAT'S TERRIBLE!
THE CEREBUS SHOULD AVA SCODGE!
AFTER JOANNE GETS HERE
WHUDDERE SHEEZ HIC DEADS?!
(OH WELL IF SHE'S DEAD CEREBUS WILL JUST GO BACK TO SAND HILLS CREEK)
(NO, CEREBUS IS GO HAS BACK TO SAND HILLS CREEK WHATHER SHE'S DEAD (OR ALIVE) AYE AYE AYE
(HEY! IS CEREBUS GEETING WEAK?)
(ONE WHAT'S THAT ALL ABOUT?,
THEN CEREBUS WILL HAVE A SCOTCH AFTER THE BODY IS FOUND.
HEY! CEREBUS ISN'T GOING TO BE SWEARING HER, IS HE?
SHUT UP.
"SHUT UP" CEREBUS ISN'T GOING TO MURDER HERZ
OR "SHUT UP" CEREBUS IS GOING TO MURDER HERZ
WHY JUST "SHUT UP" CEREBUS IS GIVING CEREBUS A HEADACHE
SHIT
NO SWEARING

SHE'S NOT A SLUT
SHE'S ALIVE
SHE'S NOT A SLUT
SHE'S ALIVE
SHE'S NOT A SLUT
GOT HER!
TWENTY
PUNCH
NOT


YOU'D BE UPSTAIRS BY NOW
OH! YOU FLUSTERED ME A BUNCH OF
THANK YOU
OH!!
AROUND HERE KNOWS SHE'S A LESBO!! NOW SHE'S GOT ONE ELSE!!
YOU REMEMBER MY GIRL FRIEND?
THE ONE WHO
OH! AYE!
???
YEAH THAT ONE. WELL I RAN INTO HER AT THE CLOTHING HUTS
SHE'S GOT ANOTHER GIRL-FRIEND!! SHE'S A- A THESBIAN!
HMMMMM
OH! DOES THAT EVER TASTE GOOD
LOUISE INVITED ME TO GO FOR A
GLP GLP
SHE'S A DRUNK! A THESBIAN DRUNK!
AND I THOUGHT, OH, HECK I HAVEN'T BEEN ANYWHERE IN JUST AGES. SO WE WENT TO THE
SHE'S A TAVERN TRAMP!
A THESBIAN TAVERN TRAMP DRUNK!

AND GUESS WHO WAS BARTENDING TODAY
Hmmm...
JEFF!

YOU REMEMBER THE JEFF THAT LOUISE USED TO BE MARRIED TO OH!
AGES AGO!
YOU REMEMBER
OH! AYE!
SHE AND HER THESBIAN TAVERN TRAMP DRUNK GIRLFRIEND
FUCKED
YEAH HIM
JEFF THE BARTENDER

AND IT WAS SO. GREAT. AND WE TALKED
AND THEY FUCKED
AND WE TALKED
AND THEY FUCKED
AND WE TALKED
AND THEY FUCKED

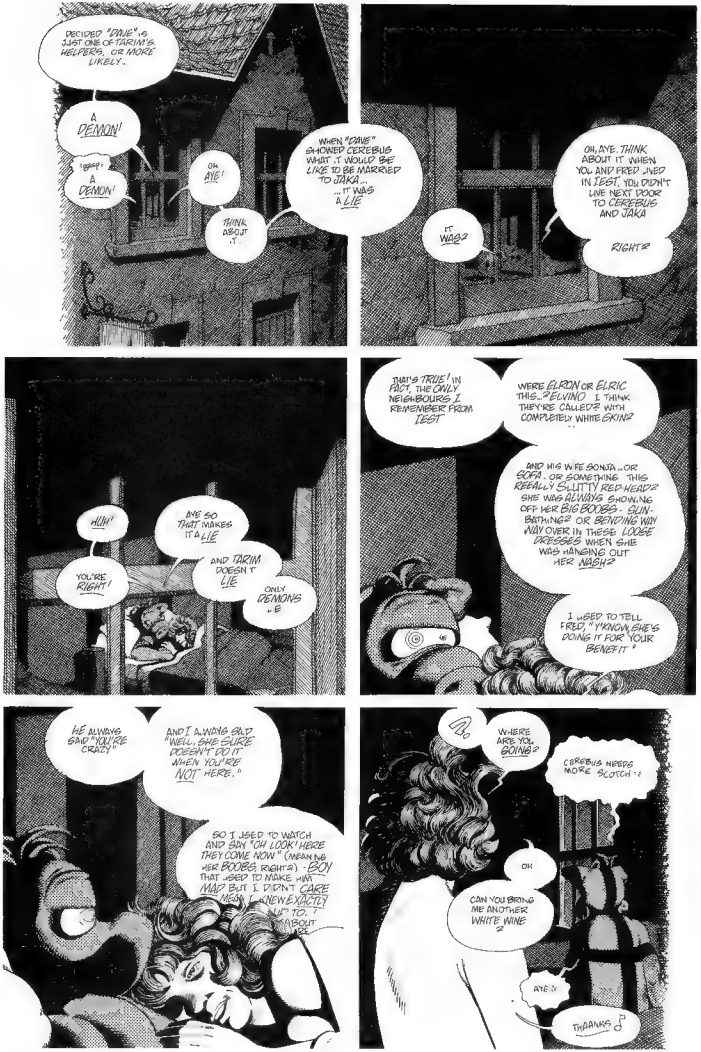
AND I SAID "NO! I HAD FOR ALL ABOUT TH- COMPLETE!"
AND I HAD!
BUT THE SECOND JEFF WENT "I ME"
"JEFF THE BARTENDER"
OH. HOW CEREBUS HATES HIM.

AND THEN WHO SHOULD WALK IN BUT TONY!
YOU REMEMBER THE MUSICIAN FRIEND I TOLD YOU ABOUT?
OH! AYE
AND THEN SHE AND HER THESBIAN TAVERN TRAMP DRUNK GIRLFRIEND FUCKED JEFF THE BARTENDER AND TOBY THE MAGICIAN!

AND WE TALKED
AND WE TALKED
AND WE TALKED
AND THEY FUCKED
AND THEY FUCKED
AND THEY FUCKED

THEN
JUDY AND LISA CAME IN...
MORE THESBIANS!

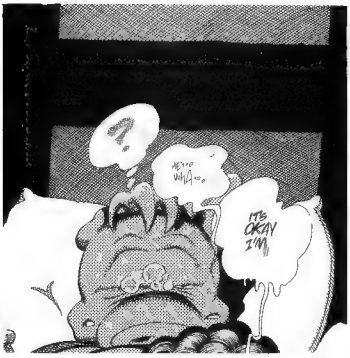
AND THEN JEFF THE BARTENDER AND TOBY THE MAGICIAN FLIPPED ALL FOUR
AND WELL... I JUST HAD TO LEAVE I KNOW IT'S SILLY BUT I'M UNCOMFORTABLE AROUND THEM AROUND
WHAT'S THE WORD FOR IT? WOMEN WHO, YOU KNOW - SLEEP WITH WOMEN
ALL FOUR UH...
UH... "THESBIANS"
YEAH THESBIANS
SO ANYWAY, I WAS UNCOMFORTABLE AROUND THEM SO I LEFT
DO YOU THINK THAT MAKES ME A BAD PERSON?
NAY
ACTUALLY I WAS GOOD THAT THEY SHOWED UP WHEN THEY DID
I MEAN I HADN'T EVEN NOTICED THAT IT WAS DARK OUT.
I DIDN'T WORRY YOU
DID I?
GETTING HERE SO LATE I MEAN
LIE!
HUH?!
OH!
NAY
NAY, CEREBUS HADN'T NOTICED IT WAS DARK OUT...
EITHER
YOU SEE? THAT'S WHY I JUST LOVE YA
HAHA
I MEAN...
WHY I LOVE OUR ARRANGEMENT WHEN I WAS WITH FREDA IF I WAS SO MUCH AS A MINUTE LATE, HE'D GO INSANE!
I DON'T KNOW WHAT HE THOUGHT I WAS DOING
SLEEPING WITH SOMEONE ELSE. OR. I DON'T KNOW
BUT ONE THING SURE HE DIDN'T ME AND ONCE I WITH HIM I SWO I WOULD NEVER SLEEP WITH SO WHO DIDN'T TR LIKE THAT ONE SLEPT WITH ME SEEM
CEREBUS HAS TO GET OUT OF HERE

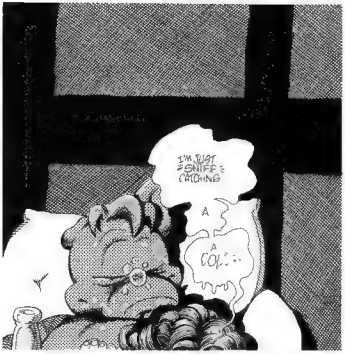

DECIDED "DIXIE", OR JUST ONE OF TARIM'S HELPERS, OR MORE LIKELY..
A DEMON!
...A DEMON!
OH AYE!
THINK ABOUT IT.
WHEN "DIXIE" SHOWED CEREBUS WHAT IT WOULD BE LIKE TO BE MARRIED TO JAKA... ...IT WAS A LIE
IT WAS?
OH, AYE. THINK ABOUT IT. WHEN YOU AND FRED LIVED IN IBSET, YOU DIDN'T LIVE NEXT DOOR TO CEREBUS AND JAKA
RIGHT?
HUH!
YOU'RE RIGHT!
IF SO THAT MAKES IT A LIE
AND TARIM DOESN'T LIE.
ONLY DEMONS DO
THAT'S TRUE! IN FACT, THE ONLY NEIGHBOURS I REMEMBER FROM IBSET
WERE ELRON OR ELRIC THEY'RE CALLED? WITH COMPLETELY WHITE SKIN?
AND HIS WIFE SONJA... OR SOFIA... OR SOMETHING. THIS REALLY SLUTTY RED HEAD? SHE WAS ALWAYS SHOWING OFF HER BIG BOOBS - SUNBATHING? OR BENDING WAY OVER IN THESE LOOSE DRESSES WHEN SHE WAS HANGING OUT HER WASH?
I USED TO TELL FRED, "I KNOW SHE'S DOING IT FOR YOUR BENEFIT."
HE ALWAYS SAID "YOU'RE CRAZY."
AND I ALWAYS SAID "WELL, SHE SURE DOESN'T DO IT WHEN YOU'RE NOT HERE."
SO I USED TO WATCH AND SAY "OH LOOK! HERE THEY COME NOW" (MEANING HER BOOBS, RIGHT?) - BOY THAT USED TO MAKE HIM MAD! BUT I DIDN'T CARE MEAN, I KNEW EXACTLY BUT TO, I WASN'T ABOUT MUCH...
WHERE ARE YOU GOING?
CEREBUS NEEDS MORE SCOTCH.
OH
CAN YOU BRING ME ANOTHER WHITE WINE?
AYE.
THANKS

LAIRD McJOOLIE'S
"HERRE'S LEWKEEN UP YIBER KELT"
OCH
WHISE GEWD
SENGLE MALT
WHESKEY
18 DAY AUDE
BRAKEFIGT NUKE DISTILLERY
POLNYEW
MMM?
SLOSH
I'M SAYING
(WHAT)
YOU WERE SAYING SOMETHING ABOUT WHAT A GREAT RELATIONSHIP
BEEP
EXCUSE ME!
RELATIONSHIP YOU HAVE
WITH TARIM
OH!
OH AYE GEORGIANA'S GRADE RELATIONSHIP WITH HIM
TARIM
GLUP
GASLUP
LOSS
GRASS
WHAT'S IT MAKES IT GREAT?
MMM?
YOUR RELATIONSHIP WITH TARIM
WHAT MAKES IT GREAT?

BECAUSE TARTM FERGIVES 'ERBISS NOMADDER WHAT HE!
FORGIVE YOUZ
FORGIVE YOU FOR WHAT?!?
FERSLEEBING WITH YOU!
CERBISS CAN'D SAD
THAD!
WHOA!
CERBISS KNOWS
LIE!
MAKE SOMETHING UP!
QUIGLY!
JEEZ! CERBISS TEFFINK THAD IN DA FEELING
"CERBISS FERGETS"
WHAD
SHE NEVER FERGIVE THAT NA MILLION
'ERBISS HIC! FERGETS
HASS NOW-D NERRSS
TARM-FERGIVES CERBISS AN THEN 'ERBISS FERGET'S WOTTE HE DIDZ EH?
HIC! BEEN FERGIVEN FOR
HEE HEE NICE
SO PRAGTICKLY HEE HEE CERBISSSS MODDO!
WHUHAT 1S2
HEE HEE FERGIVE US
WHUHUHAAAAT?
"FERGIVEN?"
"FERGET!"
EWWWWW YOU KNOWS I HATE IT WHEN YOU CROSS YOUR EYYES.
HAHAHAHA
HEE HEE
SNORT
YOOHOO!! EEEP! HOT!
"FERGIVEN? FERGET!"
AK! NO TIGGLING!

ARE YOU GOING TO BREAK MY HEART?
SNIFF
SNIFF


?
IT'S OKAY I'M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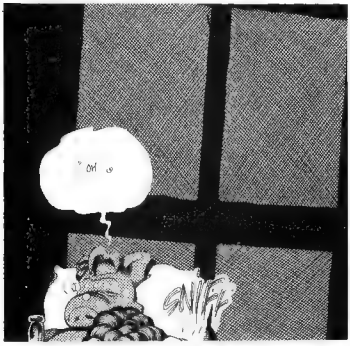
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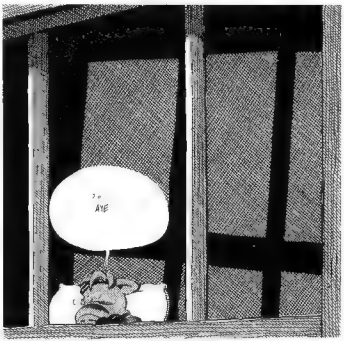
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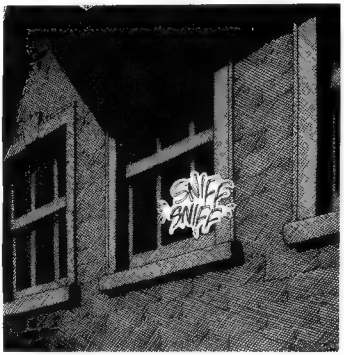
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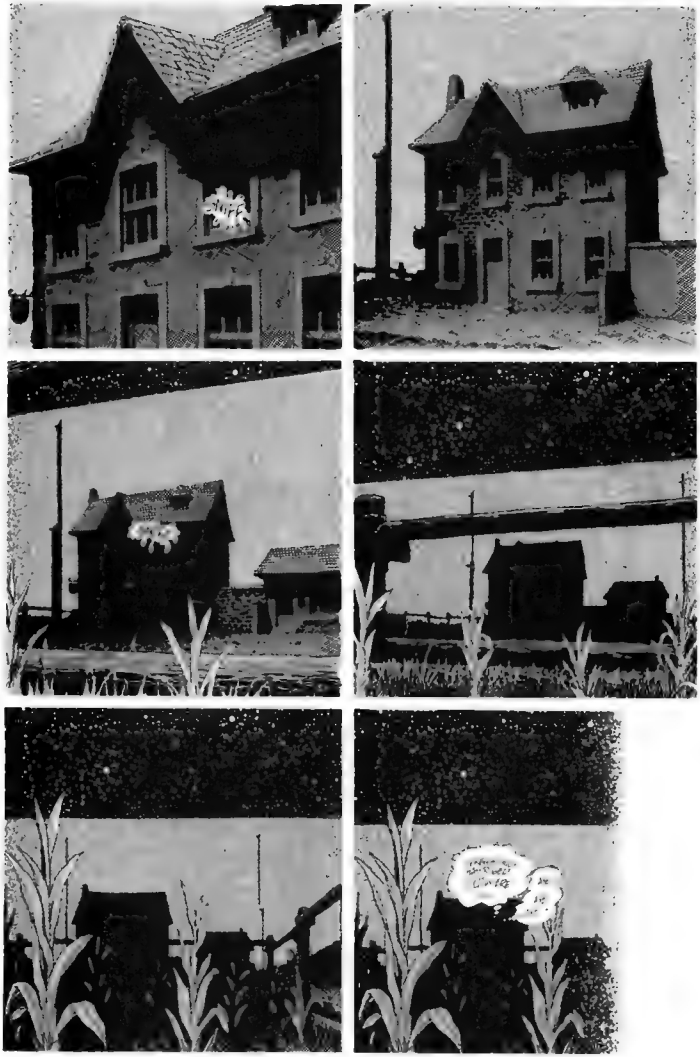
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FROM HELL

One of the reasons I wanted to do this "chat" with you is — I know you don't read The Comics Journal *faithfully anymore and I can't say as I blame you (I often find myself wondering why* I *still read it) -- there's this Robert Cwiklik fellow who went on a bit of a strange rant in the* Journal *about why the comic-book medium is unsuited to do large, complex works. Just as I was preparing myself to devour* From Hell *in its entirety he was on the* Journal*'s letters page saying that* Cerebus *is a "serious work, but it isn't realistic." Well, that's water off a duck's back, but as I was reading* From Hell *-- particularly that marvel-filled final volume — the thought came to me, "You know, I'd bet that Cwiklik fellow wouldn't think this is realistic, either." Interesting that what is water off a duck's back to Dave Sim author was a knife in the ribs to Dave Sim Fanboy. I was quite indignant on your behalf. And I realised as I analysed the difference in viewpoints that the crux of the thing was; "What is and isn't reality?" Personally, I find that work which functions on the level of mere "this is what happened, this is what they said, this is what it looked like" to be unsatisfying — or, at least, less satisfying. So, I thought maybe an informal dialogue between two thoughtful chaps who tend to perceive reality in terms of "wheels-within-larger-wheels-within-still-larger-wheels-within-wheels-so-large-you-could-vomit-contemplating-them" might serve as a counterpoint — an invigorating tonic — to alleviate the symptoms produced by the* Journal*'s cold-porridge diet of "a wheel is a circular frame of hard material, solid or spoked, that is capable of turning on an axis" (Gary Groth presumed to be the axis, of course) Or maybe we can just dispense with the opposing viewpoint in this initial exchange and get right into the interesting and* really *interesting things you and Eddie accomplished in* From Hell.

Well, first off, I suppose I should briefly preface this by pointing out that my reasons for not following the *Journal* very closely of late are probably different to your own and aren't necessarily born of any disenchantment with the magazine itself, per se. Despite its occasional forays into pointless sniping, manufactured slanging matches, and all the rest, it probably remains the most incisive magazine related to the comics field that is currently available. The lapse in my reading of the *Journal* and indeed all other publications in the same area comes entirely from my own current sense of distance from the comics industry. Despite my abiding love of the medium, it is not my *only* interest or indeed even my *majo r* interest at the moment. Consequently, at a time when there are very few comics that I actually see or read, comics commentary tends to disappear from my reading list altogether. No criticism of anyone other than myself should be inferred from this.

Given the above, it probably comes as no surprise that I haven't seen the article you speak of, but if your summary of its viewpoint is accurate, I don't imagine I'd have had many thoughts about it one way or the other. I'm sure that these are someone's genuine opinions, but opinion is surely a devalued currency at this juncture of the twentieth century, simply by virtue of the vast amount of it there is flooding the market. To assert that comics as a medium doesn't lend itself to longer works seems pretty meaningless, even if we ignore *Our Cancer Year, Maus, Stuck Rubber Baby,* and all the rest and assume that it's true: that comics as a medium does not readily allow works of any great length. Even if this *were* true, the proper response could only be "So what?" The commercial practicalities of the movie industry more or less guarantee that films above two hours long will be comparatively rare. This doesn't seem to have proven a great restriction to the field of cinema. In painting, the simple laws of physics and human architecture more or less determine that a canvas, even at its largest, will be not bigger than the average domestic wall. Really, it isn't so much length as what you do with it. I've been telling myself this since puberty and have come to see that it contains great wisdom.

As regards the increasingly quaint notion of "Realism," a concept dependent upon the broader notion of "Reality," then I'm afraid that I'm equally at a loss. Traditional notions of realism in art, which are anyway in constant revision, would seem to be left floundering in the wake of Einstein and the quantum physicists that followed after him. The physicist Niels Bohr, while conducting particle experiments using the vats at the Carlsberg brewery in Copenhagen, famously remarked to the effect that all of our observations of the cosmos or the quanta can only be seen, in the last analysis, as observations of ourselves, of the processes of our own consciousness. This became known as "The Copenhagen Interpretation," and while I might quibble over the man's choice of beers, I'm not inclined to argue with his basic theory.

The simple fact of things is that we can never directly perceive any such phenomenon as this putative "reality": all we can ever perceive is *our own perceptions,* with these perceptions assembled into a constantly updated mosaic of apprehensions (or misapprehensions) that we call reality. If, for example, we take a dramatic human event such as a murder, then what is the reality of the situation? Is it the forensic evidence and nothing more? Well, yeah, maybe. If we're meat and nothing more, then I guess you could argue that forensics are the only reality in such a situation. If, on the other hand, there is more to us than meat and ballistics, then other considerations must surely be taken into account. What were the thoughts and feelings of the victim? Of the murderer? Of those who witnessed or were connected to the crime? Aren't these a part...perhaps the major part...of the reality of the event,

even though they are subjective impressions? What of abstracts such as the murder's sociological implications? What of its mythic or poetic meaning in the broader scheme of things?

These are all surely equally valid facets of reality. I suggest that if reality were genuinely a simple matter of forensics, ballistics, and gross physical mechanics, we'd all have things a fucking sight easier. The distressing or glorious truth is rather that our fantasies are real things. They exist, albeit in an immaterial realm beyond the reach of science or empirical investigation. They influence our behaviour and thus influence the material world, for better or worse. In effect, fantasy is a massive *component* of reality and cannot really be discussed as a separate entity in itself.

Mervyn Peake's sublime *Gormenghast* trilogy, snifflily excluded from the accepted canon of worthwhile English literature for reasons probably not dissimilar to those that you attribute to the *Journal* piece, is a portrait of the ritual-bound emotional dream life of England in the forties and fifties, a haunting and meaningful snapshot that could not have been formulated as anything *but* fantasy. If we are to exclude anything beyond the chain-link fence of traditional realism from that which we accept as serious and worthwhile art, then in one sublime stroke we shall have utterly gutted the entirety of world culture. Good-bye Swift, Rabelais, and all art or literature based upon a classical or mythological theme. Good-bye Pynchon, Burroughs, Blake. Wilde has to go, or at least *Dorian Gray*. Hawthorne for *The Marble Faun*. Henry James for *The Turn of the Screw*. As for M.R. James, W.H. Hodgson, Wells, Verne, Eddie Poe, and other similar genre-bound losers, they haven't a hope. While we're setting fire to the curtains, let's not forget the utter lack of human, emotional, or conversational realism in most eighteenth-century literature, and torch that as well. Then we can presumably all wander up the same irrefutable real and gritty cul-de-sac as Hemingway and fellate our father's Webley with as much verisimilitude as we can muster.

The idea that Art should only ever be a mirror to reality has always seemed ass-backwards to me, given that Art is always and everywhere well-groomed and impeccably turned out, whereas Reality wears a pair of two-year-old Adidas trainers and a *Toy Story* T-shirt. As far as I'm concerned, it's rather the job of *reality* to try and reflect Art. The purpose of Art is not to mirror reality, but to shape it by the imprints and aspirations that it leaves in the human mind.

Anyway, enough about Art and Reality. Let's talk about me.

Well said. I had a couple of occasions to watch you interacting with your wife of the time — now ex-wife — and I was struck by the fact... oh, sod it. Let's talk about your writing and leave you out of it, shall we?

As I told you on the phone, I don't really want to follow a tedious question-and-answer format with this. When I visited that Scots bastard Eddie Campbell (it really does take one to know one), we were both into our cups one afternoon and he started in on your scripts. You know, he would just get Anne to go through them and underline what had to be in the panel and bollocks to all your windy exposition. Having read a number of your scripts, I pointed out that you were always very good about letting the artist know that a lot of the description was for your benefit and could be used or not used as it suited him or her (hi, Melinda). Well, Eddie was having none of it and goes into his studio and roots out one of your scripts and begins a dramatic reading of one of your lengthier descriptions. Or undramatic reading, rather, by way of emphasising his own point. So, Eddie's sitting in the kitchen droning your description, and I'm sitting on the postage-stamp-sized back porch (Campbell Enterprises being a smoke-free environment) facing into the kitchen. Now, having just read a hundred or so pages of From Hell *in photocopy form, I am as immersed in 1888 London as I'm ever likely to be, anyway, and I start disappearing mentally and psychically into your description. With Eddie droning and droning it begins to envelop me like an incantation, and I begin rocking back and forth on the white plastic kitchen chair I'm sitting on, thoroughly inside of your word-rhythms and invocations, simultaneously resentful of the sneer on the old Campbell mug and anticipating the good-natured or not-so-good-natured (both of us being Scots bastards) row that is imminent as a result of our divergent reactions. Something had to give, and it turned out to be the chair I was sitting on. One leg snaps off, pitching me over backwards and hurling one of Eddie's prized, limited-edition Guinness glass steins out of my hand — the stein bounces neatly down a half-dozen stairs before smashing into a million fragments. Of course, I'm apologising all over the place, and Eddie is crestfallen. They don't make the glass steins anymore, do I have any idea how many Guinness he had to drink to get each one of them (as if THAT was some torturous ordeal for him), etc., etc. He had had six of them (six being the number of the Lovers in the tarot — and what else, metaphorically speaking, is the even-handed balance of a writer and artist than a literary/artistic love affair?), and now he had five (the number of the Hierophant; interpreter of arcane wisdom, which in its negative aspect is epitomised by the imposition of said interpretation without the accompanying wisdom). Served him right, I actually thought. Served him bloody well right.*

I imagine you must've had some hard moments writing some of those descriptions, weaving a word-invocation around yourself to draw yourself into the proceedings. I'm thinking particularly of Volume Seven, which depicts the most grisly and ritualistic of the murders.

Well, I can't in all honesty claim to be surprised by the incessant complaints of this embittered transportee. This kind of craven back-stabbing is, of course, only to be expected of a clan that sided with the English during the Highland clearances and slaughtered the McGregors in their beds. Do you know, there's a hotel situated at the top of Glencoe where to this day they have a sign on the lounge door that reads "No dogs or Campbells"? And this isn't just me saying bad things about Eddie: this is the

deep and resonant bass voice of History itself saying bad things about Eddie.

On the matter of what has been viewed in some quarters as an untoward wordiness in my panel descriptions, might I draw your attention to the final volume of *From Hell*, specifically to page two, panel five of our epilogue, *The Old Men On The Shore*. In the script description for this panel I unfortunately allowed myself a moment of laxity and omitted the words "INSPECTOR ABBERLINE'S HEAD IS STILL ON HIS SHOULDERS DURING THIS PANEL. IT HAS NOT RETREATED TORTOISE-LIKE INTO HIS NECK, NOR HAS IT IN SOME FASHION MANAGED TO REFRACT LIGHT AROUND IT LIKE A KLINGON SPACESHIP SO THAT THE INSPECTOR RESEMBLES SOMETHING OUT OF MAGRITTE WITH HIS BOWLER FLOATING THERE SUSPENDED ABOVE THE EMPTY COLLAR OF HIS COAT." Last time I'll make that mistake, obviously.

For the unsuspecting reader, let me step in and say that I freely admit to having provoked you, Mr. Moore, into an uncharacteristically mean-spirited jibe at your collaborator and our mutual friend. "Let's you and him fight" being something of a Scottish national motto common to all members of our sour-dispositioned geographical accident, as it were. I am ashamed of myself and will attempt to be better than my genetic nature for the rest of this discussion. Besides, I've gotten the cart very much before the horse in skipping forward to Volume Seven, haven't I? Let's begin at the beginning. Gerhard has just read the story in its entirety and read it the same way I did — the story first and then the meticulous appendices, referring back to the pages and panels in question. I'm sure it wasn't false modesty that led you to be so self-deprecating in these afterwords, but rather a genuine modesty, being as you were the first to so extensively research an historical work in the comics form and to share the extent of that research with your readers. "Is this going to look pretentious or vainglorious" must have occurred to you on more than one occasion — comic-book creators feeling compelled to hide most traces of their "light" under the ponderous "bushel basket" of the lowest common denominator. One thing did strike me in reading these notes that the entirety of the story seemed to be "in place" from the get-go. When you tell us that this point or that point would be developed more fully in future volumes, by God, they were.

So. At the very beginning, were you reading about Jack the Ripper to any great extent and then began to evolve the theory of interconnected mayhem across two centuries that is the real centrepiece of From Hell? *Did your interest in the suppression of matriarchal societies come first? Freemasonry? I'm asking you to go back almost a decade, I realise, but I am interested in which chickens came before which eggs and vice versa, to the best of your recollection (as they say at Senate inquiries).*

Well, I suppose I'd have to preface my answer by saying that all of my serious work has to some extent always been intended as a kind of study and exploration of a given dynamic process. *V For Vendetta* set out to explore the dynamics of fascism and anarchy in the form of a fantasy/adventure narrative. *Watchmen* set out to explore, amongst other things, the dynamics of power in a post-Hiroshima world. With *Lost Girls* it's the dynamic interaction of war and eroticism that is under scrutiny. Please understand that I'm not claiming any of these dynamic explorations as massive philosophical successes: I'm simply trying to give a name to the process involved.

With *From Hell*, the seed idea was simply that of murder, any murder. It had occurred to me that Murder is a human event at the absolute extreme of the human experience. It struck me that an in-depth exploration of the dynamics of a murder might therefore yield a more extreme and unprecedented kind of information. All that needed to be decided upon was which murder. Perhaps predictably, I never even considered the Whitechapel murders initially, simply because I figured they were worn out, drained of any real vitality or meaning by the century of investigation and publicity attached to them. I started out by trawling for more obscure and unusual homicides, like the case of Dr. Buck Ruxton, for example (a kind of 1930s Lord Lucan figure who killed his wife and nanny but never managed to pull off the necessary subsequent disappearance).

It was only towards the end of 1988, with so much Ripper material surrounding me in the media on account of it being the centenary of the murders, that I began to understand that, firstly, there were still ways to approach the Whitechapel murders that might expose previously unexplored seams of meaning, and secondly that the Ripper story had all the elements that I was looking for. Set during fascinating and explosive times in a city rich with legend, history, and association, the case touched peripherally upon so many interesting people and institutions that it provided the precise kind of narrative landscape that I required. You see, to some extent the peripheries of murder...the myth, rumour, and folklore attached to a given case...had always seemed more potentially fruitful and rewarding than a redundant study of the hard forensic facts at a murder's hub. This traditional approach to murder might tell us Whodunit (which is admittedly the most immediate of practical considerations), but it does not tell us what happened on any more than the most obvious and mechanical level. To find out anything truly significant, we must take the plunge into myth and meaning, and to me a case with the rich mythopoeic backwaters of the Whitechapel murders suddenly seemed like the perfect spot to go fishing.

Having defined the purpose and the territory to my satisfaction, I then undertook my preliminary reading of the ground site. By this I mean that I visited and explored the territory of the murders personally, and also that I explored the landscape of the murders in terms of the literature surrounding the event. By this, I mean that I made a very broad reading and mapping, as if from a considerable altitude, a considerable distance from the event itself.

For example, I have some notes culled from a very old issue of *The Fortean Times* which deal with a group of alleged psychics being given photographs of cattle

mutilations and asked to "read" them Psychically. Phrases like "ears cut off...genitals mutilated...888...lines of force in the ground..." seemed resonant to me, as did an article in another issue of *Fortean Times* in which one of their writers, possibly Matt Hoffman in his column of American arcana, drew parallels between a plotted graph of inexplicable cattle mutilations and a plotted graph of violent crimes against women during a similar period. Obviously, these snippets never found their way into the finished *From Hell*, but they formed a part of my high-altitude mental impression of the Whitechapel events: a kind of fuzzy, low definition map, as seen through cloud where nevertheless certain prominent features of the symbolic landscape could still be seen. Rivers of theory. High points of conjecture and ley-lines of association.

This initial mapping gave me a glimpse of the whole territory in its entirety, if not in detail. I could see what features of the narrative landscape seemed the most significant and promising, even if I couldn't provide a precise soil analysis at that point to say exactly *why* they seemed promising. The mathematical theories of C. Howard Hinton, son of Gull's friend James Hinton, seemed promising. The lain Sinclair-inspired reading of London as a mythic and historical constellation seemed promising. The Masonic theories of the late Stephen Knight, whether true or not, seemed to open up fascinating territories of lore and tradition. The Masonic notion of the Universe, of space-time, as a rough and solid block hewn out by the Great Architect, with the job of finishing the work left to the Great Architect's mortal servants, the Dionysiac Artificers and the Freemasons, well, that seemed to fit in with everything else. Hitler's conception in 1888 seemed highly resonant. The matricentral/patriarchal notions of myth and history came from an intuitive reading of the "London Pentacle" as described in chapter four, filtered through the intuitions of Robert Graves.

Basically, what I'm saying is that, yes, I did have the broad shape of the whole thing in my head, with many of the details already there, before I started. By chapter two, for example, I already had the Monster-Ripper-Halifax Slasher-Moors Murderers-Peter Sutcliffe arc of murder that we see in the last chapter firmly in my head. I did not, however, find out about Ian Brady's childhood vision of the floating head until later. I knew that I'd later be alluding to Brady when I had Gull ponder aloud upon the familiarity of the name "Brady Street" during the first murder, but I was not then aware that Brady's partner Myra Hindley would have her own name commemorated by the sacking manufacturer's premises outside which the third murder occurred. I knew that the last line of the whole book would be Robert Lee's " I think there's going to be another war," but I didn't decide to use the Von Stuck painting of the Wild Hunt, painted with Adolf Hitler's adult face superimposed upon that of the god Odin in 1889, the year of Hitler's birth, until about a month before the last issue went to press. I knew that Netley would be dying before the book concluded and that obelisks were somehow important to the symbology of the book, but I hadn't at this point found all that marvellous shit about Netley's coach colliding with an obelisk and spilling his brains on the cobbles.

The thing is, if that first high-altitude mapping is perceptive and accurate enough, whatever tiny surface details are unearthed upon closer inspection are bound to fit right into it somewhere. That's how I work, anyway.

As regards my self-deprecating tone during the appendices, it wasn't any kind of modesty so much as gruff attempt at apology for having done such a fucking sloppy and unprofessional job. I mean, "I think I read this is some book somewhere but I can't for the life of me remember which one and I can't be bothered to look for it" is hardly the high standard of investigative reportage that *From Hell* is often touted as being, is it? And the fact that something hasn't been done in comics before is really no excuse for doing a sloppy job. There's nothing at all wrong with bushels. Sometimes one needs something to hide under.

Then again, you're probably right and I'm probably being too hard on myself. At least I didn't forget to draw the main character's head.

Considering our mutual predisposition (and the larger reasons for this chat) — that it is often an evasion to say someone is "reading too much" into a given occurrence — I was amused to note when I dug out the offending panel that Abberline's dialogue is, "All the things you never get around to. All the things that never get sorted out." Doubtless the much-maligned Mr. Campbell (and we really MUST stop it) was offering his own artistic reinforcement to the two-tiered observation. Doubtless, as well, we can look forward to a safe retirement having squirreled away our rare "missing Abberline head" first printings of Volume Ten. My personal favourite in the "reading too much into it" category is in chapter four, page 8, where Gull informs Netley that "Women had power once: Back in the caves, life hinged on..." etc. Eddie has clearly lettered "Back as Balk" — balking at the expressed sentiment (the sexist swine) and adding a pen-stroke to turn the "L" into a "C."

"To find out anything truly significant, we must take the plunge into myth and meaning." I agree. Millions don't. When I visited you back in 1988 at the time when you were first gathering the From Hell *raw materials, I remember thinking how...generous you were with your thinking, considering there were two writers in the room (the other being Jamie Delano). By contrast, I was completely miserly with my own thinking. I was in the end bit of* Jaka's Story*'s first book and mentally assembling what would eventually become* Reads*. My own "high-altitude mapping" (good way of putting it, by the way) consisting of taking what was the best current thinking on the nature of the Big Bang, the factual Stephen Hawkings dry-as-dust material, and constructing a creationist myth to suit the available facts. As you're aware, I made liberal use of your "all stories are true" insights, and I was gratified indeed when you said that the creationist myth part struck you as the nearest thing to a mystical experience in print form. At one level of perception, all of us inclined towards "high-altitude mapping" are really just talking to each other, anyway, aren't we? These interests that we have, lovingly sculpted and finely burnished and then fitted into place so as not to violate the pleasure and en-*

joyment of our more...literal-minded readers, The Comics Journal, *etc., etc. Neil did a lot of it in* Sandman, *I try to do it in* Cerebus, *you do it in your own work. You know what I mean?: I'll be chortling to myself, "Wait'll Neil sees this one," or "Alan, you're going to love this."*

The gestation period for Reads *mirrors what you're talking about with your* From Hell *experience. Every little tidbit I would run across (most of them, anyway) just seemed to find its place in the finished work.*

I remember asking you — since you were the only person I ever met who thought about things the way I tend to (and Reads *was very much on my mind when I asked): Do you ever worry that we're doing these things in service to something that we would be rather horrified we were in service to if we found out? You know, what is widely and derogatorily known as Dylan's "Christian kick" when he sang, "It might be the Devil or it might be the Lord, but you're going to have to serve somebody" seems to echo that same kind of...unease, shall we say?*

Your answer at the time (as I recall) was: "I have considered it, and I've decided as long as it makes a good story, that's all that's really important." I decided if it was good enough for Alan Moore, it was good enough for me. For this, you might well have to smoke an extra turd in the infernal depths and I might well have to get it lit for you. Before I get into the specifics of From Hell, *I was wondering if you've ever reconsidered your position since then and if there were ever any worrying synchronicities of small events attached to the writing of* From Hell *that gave you pause along these lines.*

Well, Dave, that's a hell of a question to ask a man who worships a snake.

I suppose I'd have to say that for anyone who has had or believes themselves to have had an extra-normal experience, a reaction of pants-shitting holy terror is only to be expected, as are all sorts of confused and meaningless spiritual anxiety dredged up from whatever vestigial religious upbringing we went through or whatever hysterical Dennis Wheatley occult novels we happened to read during our formative years. So, yes, there have been moments, back at the outset when I got into this kind of work, when I found myself gripped by a terrified Faustian penitence: "Adders and serpents, let me breathe...I will burn my books!" Like I say, that was back at the outset.

The further I explore these ideas, however, the more it seems to become apparent that concepts like "good" or "evil" mean absolutely nothing above a certain fundamental human level. A bit higher up still, and even things like individual consciousness have no meaning. Go further and there is nothing at all that is recognisable within a human framework.

If I had to explain my basic feelings on the subject with a crude physical model, I'd have to say that at the core of things there is a blissful, hermaphrodite, endlessly creative white singularity that you might as well call absolute God. This is the light source in the canvas of existence. The light then polarises into two different frequencies, one which might be called "God considered as Female" (or black, or negative...these terms don't mean anything like what we hold them to mean upon a material level; they have nothing to do with gender or colour or value differences) and the other one which might be called "God considered as Male."

After that, the light hits something which you might metaphorically refer to as a prism. Students of the Qabala might prefer to call it the Abyss. In terms of modern physics, you might imagine it as the curved perimeter of space/time. When the white light hits this prism, it breaks up into a full spectrum of entities: Gods plural, Demons, chimera, angels, fairies, grey aliens...a plurality of spiritual colours and forces to which we have appended names, images, and identities. As this reaction spreads further from its source it seems to slow down or curdle or thicken in some way until, at the far extremities, you have physical matter. Everything in this entire continuum is a refraction of the original singular light source. The entities which we traditionally think of as "other" are in a sense nothing but ourselves unfolded — or at a higher frequency. Evil and Good don't really come into this equation. In my scheme of the Universe, there really can be nothing that is not ultimately God. Or, in the case of the Devil, God when he's drunk, as a great man famously remarked.

Anyway, if that's cleared up the entire structure of Existence for you, I'd like to return to what you said about all of us really only writing for each other. This is true on one level...which is to say a technical level...in that if we've pulled off something clever in terms of comic-book narrative, we know that there are only a few people sufficiently perceptive regarding the intricacies of comic-book narrative to completely appreciate how bloody cute we've been.

On the other hand, I must admit that I've been having those "Wait until Neil or Dave or whoever sees this" feelings much less frequently of late. More and more, the person I'm writing for is that famous imaginary friend of the fledgling writer, the conjectured reader. I feel a need to try and hone or evolve my work towards a deeper level of intimacy with the reader, by which I don't necessarily mean friendliness. Intimacy isn't always comfortable. I suppose what I mean is that I simply want to extend the reach and potency of my work. By "extending the reach" I don't mean that I want more people to read it or for it to sell more copies, but simply that I want the people who are exposing themselves to the work to feel it reach further into them than similar work has managed to reach before.

This possibly vain attempt seems to me to require a step beyond mere technique into something that is much more intuitive or feeling-based (sorry, Dave) than it is based on rationality, logic, and ability. Of course, every ounce of that precious rationality and technique will be needed to anchor the intuitions in a legible material form, but in order to get to the kind of deep-rooted human areas that I want to reach, the rational needs to be transcended in some way. What I'm trying to say in this confused meander is that, these days, I am attempting to reach through what dramatists call the fourth wall...the one between the audience and the story...and establish an eerie one-to-one relationship with the reader, or listener in the case of the two performance CDs. These days, I would

almost prefer it if nobody noticed my technical flourishes, since if they're recognized as technical flourishes, to some degree they have failed to do their job of affecting the reader subtly and unnoticeably at a distance.

As for my endless, compulsive, and liberal mouthing-off about whatever I happen to be working on at the moment, I can't say it's a big source of worry to me. If people hear that I'm planning a 400-page-plus, eight-year-long examination of the Whitechapel murders with full appendices and involving exhaustive research and then decide that they are going to beat me to it and do the very same thing, then frankly whatever they've got wrong with them is much more serious than whatever I've got wrong with me. I take my hat off to them and wish them the very best of luck, the poor, wretched, doomed bastards.

Well, we're really into the meat of it now, aren't we? My personal construction of things — and this interested me when I read your answer — resembles your own in many significant ways, with different shadings of emphasis. As you said in our phone conversation setting this whole thing up: "These things are all very subjective, aren't they?" Indeed they are. In my view, the success of the Jewish He Who Cannot Be Named God and His Christian modification/corruption (depending on your subjective view) can be attributed to the notion of a Great Unity, a notion which cut through the complexity of beliefs in the ancient world. Everything was all One at one time. Call it a DNA-level insight into the Big Bang at a time when it was still perplexing the best minds that planets just wandered about the heavens like slow-motion pinballs. This might be the entire sum and substance of what was accomplished, but its centuries of endurance might be attributable to the fact that it was enough — despite whatever mythologies and cautionary fables were grafted onto it. The Latin motto of the United States, to me, reflects this: E pluribus unum *From many, one — or in the larger sense: From many, One. There was One who became many (all aspects of the Godhead which manifested themselves in various cultures and religions,) and there is something inherently good, productive, worthwhile, satisfying in mentally rewinding the tape through the process of fragmentation and making that original Unity a central consideration in all endeavours. I would agree with the observation that the light — or Light — polarises into two frequencies, one male in its aspect and one female. What I was driving at was that the end of* Church & State, *distilled to sound byte level, comes down to "HE did it." The ending on* Reads *comes down to "SHE did It." I'm not sure that this really has anything to do with* The Light *— after all, what we know to be the known universe is pretty much an out-of-the-way cul-de-sac in an unimportant suburb of the cosmos. For the last while, anyway, I've been rather comfortably ensconced in the notion that God, the Light, is indeed Male — that reproduction in and of itself represents a kind of consolation prize once that encroachment, act of bad faith, really big misunderstanding, original sin takes place (the bad news is that we're getting further away from Enlightenment; the good news is that there are a lot more of us than there used to be). I was "holding back" on all this back in '88 when I visited you, thinking (much to my regret,) "Well, this is it, once* Reads *comes out Alan is going to be the first one in line advocating that I be ostracized from the community of all right-thinking hermaphroditic God-and-Goddess United devotees," I find it immensely gratifying that we are able to discuss how things seem to each of us respectively without...feeling?...threatened. Even though you're wrong, I mean.*

Just kidding.

I was also interested in your observation on appealing to the intended reader —and I understand the sense in which you intend it (I think). A kind of guerrilla incursion into the psyche, the senses, and the emotions. I thought with From Hell *you were particularly adept at this Gull's line to Netley: "You realise that I only share these private thoughts in recognition of your lack of cognisance?" Netley: "Why, thank you, sir....I can't say what that means to me." Gull: "Ha Ha Ha. Why, of course you can't. That is precisely why I trust you." On the one hand, it's very much a literary device. You have to stuff volume two full of all of the thinking you've done about the pentagram configuration, as much of the research as you've done, and graft it onto Gull AND come up with a good reason for him to say it out loud (this last part being the most difficult to manage). It really ends up being analogous to the mystical experience — the vertigo of finding oneself Inside the mystery. It still allows the literal-minded reader to say, "This Gull fellow is off his nut. That's what Alan's saying," which casts him or her into a situation of empathy with Netley (while allowing him or her to maintain a feeling of superiority to Netley). By the time you get us to St. Paul's — and it really must be said that Mr. Campbell outdid himself on this London tour section — all of the dialogue has had a preordained quality, an echo-resonance that mirrors the Inside-the-mystery experience. Even the most literal-minded reader had to be wanting to get "outside" by the time Netley sees it as an imperative.*

I've certainly come to share your view that there is no harm in talking openly in front of other writers. The thievish-natured usually make such a mess of it that it isn't worth troubling about and the genuinely creative usually turn it into something so new and different after they've filtered it through their own awareness that it becomes worthwhile "cross-pollinating," as it were, for that very reason.

Which brings us back to the actual murders documented in From Hell. *I remember talking to you on the phone and asking how the book was coming along, and you said that the parts concerned with the actual murders were telescoping on you. Because there was so much information to be gone through and fitted into place, it wasn't as clear how long each section was going to be to get the business covered. I mean, you didn't seem to be tearing your hair out or anything, just remarking on it like a mountain-climber who has come upon an unanticipated outcropping. How difficult a problem did you face with this? Were there any hair-pulling moments and/or central guiding intentions that pulled you through them? Is there any way to make your*

answer interesting, considering how vague and pedestrian the questions are?

I suppose the short answer is "no": I'm sure everyone will be relieved to hear that my hair is the same rich, luxuriant cascade of tumbling auburn that it ever was, with no ugly bald patches. On the other hand, that isn't to say that the tendency of the data to expand in one's hands didn't become a problem.

With hindsight, I imagine it's a problem that will be familiar to anyone working in a research-based or semi-documentary field, and it further strikes me that the nature of the phenomenon is probably mathematical. There's a form that's frequently used to exemplify fractal mathematics known as the Koch Snowflake. What this is, basically, is an equilateral triangle. An iterative computer program is applied to this and told to append a smaller equilateral triangle, exactly half the size of the original, to each of the three exposed sides. This gives a sort of Star-of-David shape, which now has twelve exposed sides. The computer will then add half-sized equilateral triangles to each of the three exposed sides. The computer will then add half-sized equilateral triangles to each of these twelve new facets, making the basic star shape more prickly and giving it lots of new exposed facets to which the computer will continue to add half-sized equilateral triangles ad infinitum. As you can imagine, the perimeter line of the shape becomes crinklier and pricklier with each new iteration of the program. The interesting thing is that since the original equilateral triangle can be drawn within a circle of a given diameter and area, the *area* of the resultant snowflake-like shape can never exceed the area of the original circle. The perimeter of the snowflake, on the other hand, can become infinite.

Another way to look at this would be to ask, "What is the length of the perimeter of Great Britain?" Now, basically speaking, there is no answer to that question that is not relative to the length of the ruler that you happen to be using. If, for example, you have a mile-long ruler and you go around Britain placing it from point to point and total up the result, you will get a figure that is accurate, but only for someone using a mile-long ruler. Obviously, using a yardstick or a foot rule would enable you to include the perimeter of all the little inlets in your measurements that a mile-long measure would exclude. This would give you a much bigger figure for the length of your perimeter. If you throw away the foot rule and use a micrometer, then the figure will become greater still. Eventually, if measured with progressively finer instrumentation, the perimeter of the country could be said to be infinite in length, although the basic *area* of the country has not changed even slightly.

As so, too, *From Hell*: the Whitechapel murders took place over a finite period of time and claimed a finite number of victims. Looked at in terms of the area of information covered, this appears at first glance to be a containable task with clearly defined limits. The problem is all in the surface detail. As more detail becomes apparent with closer and closer examination, so too does the "surface" of the narrative become more crinkly, prickly, and fractal. The perimeter of the story starts to extend towards infinity. The space and time needed for each episode expands.

Like I say, this caused unanticipated problems, but I imagine they were much worse for Eddie than for me. Writing twenty extra pages isn't anywhere near as much of a physical and mental burden as drawing them.

Speaking of Eddie, I'd have to only partly agree with your assessment of Gull and Netley's coach jaunt in chapter four. It's a staggering piece of work, and if you'd asked me at the time, I'd have rated it along with the very best things he'd ever done, if only because of the tremendous narrative power required to sustain visual interest in a protracted tour around a bunch of relatively dull-looking city buildings. However, I think that since that episode, Eddie's work has continued to get stronger and stronger. In my opinion, chapter ten, the Marie Kelly chapter, surpassed anything that came before it. I've not made up my mind yet, but I think that the final chapter may even have topped that one.

Eddie's development as an artist over the course of the strip has been phenomenal, especially given how bloody good he was to start with. For me, it's more often the tiny details that take my breath away than the obvious set pieces: the natural grace and solidity of a character's hands in the foreground. The composition of the wall tiles when Abberline's throwing up in the toilets of Scotland Yard. Horse breath. Smeared and miasmal lights in Oxford Street. Without the anchoring strength and involving sense of human reality in Eddie's drawings, I doubt that I could have even attempted some of the more metaphysical flights of fancy that provided, for me, the high points of the narrative. I think really that any way you look at it, it's an overwhelming visual achievement.

And then he goes and ruins it all eight pages from the end of the bloody epilogue.

I'm moved to speculate that the entirety of From Hell *was a kind of incantation, hinging on the fact that "X" number of Abberline heads had to appear in their proper sequence for the kingdoms and riches of this world to be laid at your feet. "Campbell?" (Netley to your Gull, perhaps?) "Yessir, Mr. Moore?" "Bring me something to hit you with"*

I wrote at some length about Eddie in previewing Bacchus, *so I'm loath to add any further niceties. I have to say, however, that I find Eddie's drawing style one of the most — if not THE most — compelling in our environment. His use of spidery-thin lines and bold slashes of black – Krigstein seems the only obvious stylistic precursor — gets my drawing hand twitching just to look at it. I remember showing Bissette photocopies of my Alec and Bacchus send-up on one of my visits to the other Northampton. "Too pretty," was his amiable assessment. Quite right he was, too. A pretty style wouldn't have suited* From Hell. *In fact it's impossible to picture anyone else drawing the book, as I'm sure you'd agree All I have to do is picture Eddie's cover for the yet-to-be-realised* Dance of the Gull-Catchers *and I start snickering. Not bad for a yet-to-be-realised cover. Right, that's enough. The bastard did cut my nuts off in his bloody comic book.*

Okay, the next question I'm going to take in stages (to avoid me prattling on for five pages getting the entirety of the question said all in one go). In our 1988 conversation, you had a number of really amazing observations about the energy (for the more literal-minded reader, make that "energy") released in the act of murder. Amazing and disturbing and I say that as a person who prides himself on not being easily disturbed (and quite enjoys it when he is). The carnival atmosphere at the scene where the first body was found — building from the one cop standing guard — into the ghoulish bedlam of the next day. This is definitely one of the implications of that release of energy, isn't it? An obvious initial "ripple in the pond" after the fact — obvious in any kind of "high-altitude mapping." I'll let you take it from there

The kind of ripple effect you're talking about is just about the first sort of pattern that one is able to make out with the initial high-altitude mapping. In fact, thinking about it, I'd say it's less like a ripple effect, with hindsight, than it is like a blast distribution pattern: you have the central area of utter devastation in the relatively small confines of Whitechapel during a relatively small period of time, the autumn of 1888. Spread out from this, there are a distribution of points that seem on first glance to have a relationship to the central point of impact: to the point where some event or personage of considerable size collided explosively with the landscape of history. These points are seemingly randomly and evenly distributed to either side of the impact zone, which is to say in the past that precedes the event and in the future that comes after it. The event is seen as a strange sort of four-dimensional shape or entity, with points of coincidence or significant incident marking the being's extremities and the limits and extents of its time-spanning form.

The immediate noticeable effect of this meta-shape as it impinges upon normal three-dimensional human historical linear consciousness could be described, I suppose, as a kind of *glamour*. I mean that both in the conventional sense of "the glamour that surrounds murder and murderers;" their sensational appeal in the eyes of the "public," and also in the medieval/magical sense of "a glamour; a charm; a spell or enchantment." Frankly, I don't think there's really any appreciable difference between the two definitions, in that they both have exactly the same effect of placing a certain dark or dazzling obsession in the minds of whoever they happen to affect.

The earliest effects (if one ignores for a moment premonitions like *Jekyll and Hyde* or Billy Blake's *Ghost of a Flea*) are those manifested in the streets of London and Whitechapel during the period of the murders. To some extent, these manifestations are closer to the source of the blast, as it were, and the reaction is more "pure" and extreme than later reactions mediated by distance or the passage of time. Maybe it's possible to glean more information from these initial reactions than it is from later, more considered ones.

For example, it seems like *everyone* got a little bit crazy around the time of the Ripper panic. The annals of the Whitechapel killings are full of unlikely characters acting as amateur detectives, running round Whitechapel in blackface make-up or turning up half-mad in public houses with blood on their clothes and muttering about stabbing women. The men of London, or at least a small but significant percentage of them, seemed to polarise between writing into the papers with wild and heroic schemes for catching the killer, or writing into the papers with sick, masturbatory fantasies in which they pretended to *be* the murderer. If it were only the men that were affected by the murders, then we would have a fairly neat and contemporary moral of the "men are not damn good" variety to tie up our observation with, but this is not the case.

The women of the East End, according to reports of the period, were gripped in part by a kind of appalled fascination with the murders. Many would talk, almost longingly according to accounts, of the likelihood of their being the next victim. Some commentators have remarked that it almost seemed as if they were actively fantasizing about this eventuality. Now, this is disturbing. It certainly deserves scrutiny, although it would probably be unwise to leap to any hasty conclusions. One woman of the period, when asked, said that she'd thought how nice it would be to be one of the victims, simply because people had said *such nice things* about all the women murdered to date. The implication is that it would be worth going through evisceration to be lionized thus. Bear in mind that life for these women would in all likelihood not extend that much longer anyway, just speaking statistically, and that dying of malnutrition, or in childbirth, or from a "ginny" kidney is probably not instantly preferable to sudden death at the hands of a murderer. Also, to be killed by such a celebrated figure would somehow be to link yourself to him with the act of death…a reverse of the Mark Chapman syndrome, maybe…and, of course, people would say such nice things.

I myself see this phenomenon, both the male and female components of it, as a kind of echo in the "mind-space" of the period. Richard Dawkins might call it a "meme," the information equivalent of a gene, a kind of replicating virus-like idea permeating society and influencing how we think and act. Rupert Sheldrake, much less respectable than Dawkins, might talk in terms of a morphogenetic resonance, a thought-form reproducing itself in what Sheldrake terms a "morphogenetic field." For my part, being much less respectable than either of the two above gentlemen, I would talk in terms of the murders being events not only in the "real" material world, but also in the terrain that I term "Idea Space," a kind of medium or field or space or dimension in which thoughts occur. I believe this space to be at least in part mutual, rather than discrete, which is to say that I believe that this "space " impinges to some degree upon all consciousness and that it is co-accessible. Sometimes, certain ideas or notions seem to be or are said to be "in the air." What do we mean by that? When James Watt invented the steam engine, it turned out that several other inventors had come up with the idea independently during roughly the same period. Charles Fort remarked on this to the effect that he guessed it was just "steam-engine time." I'm sure that you get the general idea: that consciousness,

including at a group level, is a kind of medium in which ideas or thought-forms are the equivalent of solid objects or land masses, and in which the awareness and "self" of the individual can be seen as a moving point in the fabric.

In terms of the Ripper crimes, I suggest that maybe the idea forms of Leather-Apron and his victims became almost like the compelling and archetypal figures in some Nohplay of the human soul, with at least part of the "audience" responding and identifying unconsciously with the central players, even to the point of miming or mimicking their behaviour. This kind of conjecture becomes especially interesting, to my mind, when you apply it to a case like that of the "Halifax Slasher," as alluded to in the notes for chapter fourteen. Here, there was no real material figure at the centre of the case. There was *only* the echo in the mind of the onlookers, a reverberation without a signal.

The further we move away in time from the epicentre of the event, the more rarefied the effects become, and yet they are still noticeable. Most serial murderers, it seems, are aware of Jack the Ripper as a kind of benchmark in their field — almost a patron saint. Albert de Salvo, as just one example, in his confession to the cops said that when they knew the details of his case, it would outdo Jack the Ripper.

Then of course we have the echoes in our media, in our slasher films, and in the minds of those singular obsessives, the Ripperologists. Add to these the lines of chance and coincidence ravelling out from the case itself and leading into both the ancient past and the present day and we have a pretty good preliminary picture of the ripple or blast-pattern that *is* the case, just as much as the initial murders can be said to *be* the case. We have the basic grid on which to map the murder.

Yes. Extraordinary in every sense of the word. I remember sitting spellbound back in '88 as you went through the litany of personalities and celebrities interconnected with the murders. Of course the only Victorian personality of whom I had any great awareness was Wilde — I was in the midst of researching him for book two of Jaka's Story *and what would become* Melmoth. *Although his own debacle wouldn't come until the mid-'90s, the seeds were definitely sown by 1888. You quote from "Lord Arthur Savile's Crime" — one of my favourite Oscar Wilde short stories — and, of course, most of his published wit centres on the "double life" which was his own undoing. Number thirteen Little College Street, where he got involved with male prostitutes and "renters" (blackmailers) isn't far from Whitechapel, if I'm not mistaken. When he had his hair permed, he took great delight in the fact that he was said to resemble a bust of Nero in the British Museum. When he started going in for "rough trade," he used to tell intimates that he was "feasting with panthers." I used to think that was hyperbole until you consider what a starving thug would resemble when presented with a champagne supper in a private room at one of the better restaurants. The* From Hell *chapter showing the contrast between Gull starting his day in his pampered and elegant home and the prostitutes starting their day expressed this very eloquently. It seems an implication of Empire, doesn't it? England's global empire with London at its heart and Whitechapel in the heart of London. Oscar Wilde was probably only the most public incarnation of a spreading awareness: "We are Rome! Everything is ours for the taking!" How many double lives were being led? It beggars the imagination, when so many human souls were there for the taking, for mere pennies. I'd like to get back to Gull himself — or whoever Jack the Ripper was — but that being "ground zero," as it were, I thought I'd see if you had anything to add to what I've said here about the "outward bound" ripple effect specifically, before I switch that particular gear?*

Regarding Oscar Wilde and his double life, it's probably worth mentioning a piece on *Jekyll and Hyde* that I saw which made a convincing case for saying that the whole central metaphor of Stevenson's nightmare story related to a current of suppressed homosexuality in male Victorian society and also, possibly, in the author himself. It referred specifically to the scene in which Edward Hyde is approached in a dark street by a refined, elderly gentleman who whispers something to Hyde that precipitates an outbreak of animal violence. This, and the reaction of Stevenson's wife to the book...she thought it hideous and did not approve of its publication...add weight to the suggestion that possibly it was thought to be too revealing of this Uranian socio-sexual undercurrent. To some degree, even if we do not focus on homosexuality as the central issue, the plight of Henry Jekyll is resonant as a metaphor for the whole of a Victorian society where virtue was never lauded so loudly in public nor vice practised so excessively in private. You can almost see in that novel the exact point where the mass Victorian mind became uneasily aware of its own shadow: Hyde as Jekyll's shadow; Jack as Gull's; Wilde's panther-snacks as the shadow of society's own corseted sitting-room asexuality.

Jumping the rails completely and moving on to your invitation for any final words on the "ripple effect," I should probably muddy the waters further by throwing in another possible metaphorical way of looking at the phenomenon. This is a kind of game invented by physicists and mathematicians in order to model and study the behaviour of the early universe. I believe it's called "The Game of Life."

What happens is, you take a checkerboard of potentially infinite size (or do it on a computer, which would be a lot easier) and then randomly scatter a number of black checkers into the board, letting them fall where they will. This done, you apply a couple of very simple and fundamental rules. Maybe one rule is that for any two pieces with a diagonal space empty between them, a piece will be added to fill that space. Maybe another rule says that for any three pieces in a connected line laterally, the central piece will be removed. These aren't the actual rules of the game, which I'm afraid I don't remember, but the point is that the actual rules are that few and that simple.

If these very simple rules are applied to the randomly scattered checkers on the board and then applied again to the new configurations that result and so on, what hap-

pens is that you very quickly get complex, orderly and beautiful radiating patterns arising out of the completely incoherent initial chaos. This suggests that from simple and random start conditions, complex order can radiate, given the application of a minimal number of simple rules.

Applying this to the Whitechapel crimes and to the development of the field of Ripper theory since then, it's possible to see how the initial event might very well have been something utterly random and chaotic. (I think of Eddie's persuasive theory that I read somewhere a while back, which was that Jack the Ripper was, in all likelihood, simply the lunatic nearest the asylum door when it was left open, and he happened to be holding the bread knife at the time. This, on reflection, has a great deal to recommend it.) Taking the initial meaningless chaos of this supposed event, we next apply a couple of very simple rules. For rule one, maybe, we could say, "Speculation on the crimes will only extend insofar as it is profitable for it to extend." Rule two might be: "Published speculations on the Whitechapel murders will be profitable in direct proportion to their degree of novelty."

Apply these very simple and practical rules to the incoherent and chaotic sprawl of bloodstains, alibis, and random events surrounding the Whitechapel crimes, and it seems very possible to me that you would quickly find spectacular orderly blossoms of idea and theory radiating out from the murders, in breathtaking arrays of increasing complexity and symmetry. Perhaps this is our ripple pattern, or, at least, another useful way of understanding it — another useful model.

This is probably stuff I'll be covering in *Dance of the Gull Catchers*, but it strikes me that the interesting thing is the point where this radiating and increasingly complex matrix of theory and idea starts to become *self-aware*, which is to say aware of itself as a process, as a developing body of myth. You can see some signs of "Ripperology" starting to include itself as an entity within its own field of study, with critical appraisals of the evolving field of Whitechapel literature appearing in *Begg, Fido*, and Skinner's *Jack the Ripper A-Z* alongside information on the crimes themselves, and you can certainly see it at work in *From Hell*. I suppose what I'm saying is that the initial ripple effect reaches a point where you get all sorts of rich interference patterns and overlappings and feedback loops, so that the simplest of initial splashes or ripples can quickly become a complex and shimmering moiré effect straight out of one of Jim Steranko's good days. Anyway, those are my only current musings on the subject, so back to you.

continued

FROM COVER

being born and consumed in this ascension of the rocket, and a poor moment of vertigo at the thought that man now had something with which to speak to God — the fire was white as a torch and long as the rocket itself, a tail of fire, a face, yes now the rocket looked like a thin and pointed witch's hat, and the flames from its base were the blazing eyes of the witch. Forked like saw teeth was the base of the flame which quivered through the lens of the binoculars. Upwards. As the rocket keened over and went up and out to sea, one could no longer watch its stage, only the flame from its base. Now it seemed to rise like a ball of fire, like a new sun mounting the sky, a flame elevating itself.

Last issue's excerpt: Hugh Kingsmill from his introduction to *The Poisoned Crown*

mea culpa

EAST OF STEINBECK

It was Bissette — self-confessed media junkie — who pointed out that my lengthy dissertation on *East of Eden*, James Dean and John Steinbeck in part three of "Comics and the Mass Medium" was a little off the mark. Yes, James Dean starred in the movie version of *East of Eden* and yes, John Steinbeck wrote the book upon which it was based. Unfortunately, the James Dean movie that I was describing was *Giant*, not *East of Eden*.

Far from being depressed (Steve was worried that I would be depressed), I chuckled appreciatively. As I told Gerhard later, "Well, I said in part three that I didn't know much about Steinbeck and I guess that proves it."

It occurs to me that *Giant* was adapted from a novel of the same name — or perhaps I'm mistaken about that as well. All in all, it seems to prove the underlying point: while actors and movies are remembered, the creative works upon which they are based are largely forgotten.

East of Eden, Giant...

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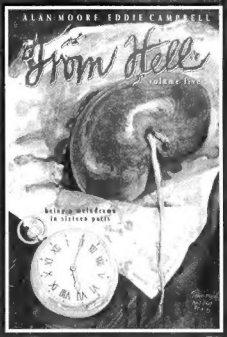

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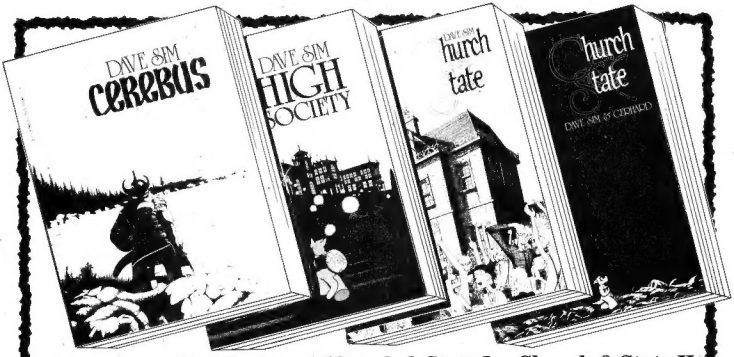

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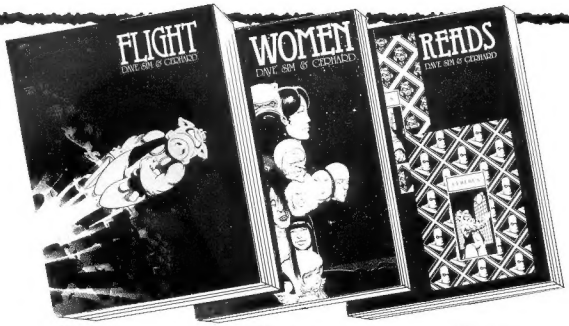

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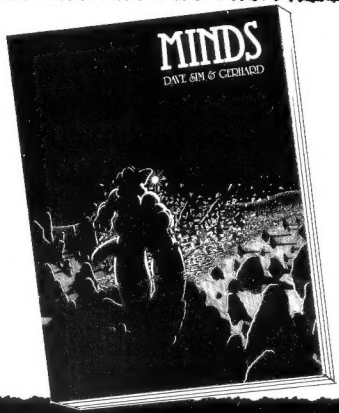

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